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ABSTRACT

University for Man (UFM) has developed into a major national organization, impacting the worlds of lifelong learning, alternative education, and rural and community resource development. It was founded in 1968 when Manhattan, Kansas, residents secured several hundred dollars from the Kansas State University student government to organize seven courses, led by volunteers, free of grades, credits, and charge, and open to anyone. Based on the assumption that anyone can teach and anyone can learn, regardless of their formal academic qualifications, community projects have required seven developmental steps: (1) identification of interested community members; (2) formation of an advisory board to assist in planning, to avoid duplication of existing community services, to aid with publicity, and to generate funding; (3) a survey to determine participants' interests and needs; (4) publication of program brochures; (5) distribution of the brochures; (6) registration of participants; and (7) presentation of workshops to provide support and guidance for lay teachers. UFM currently offers about 900 courses annually for over 12,000 Manhattan participants and has provided a vehicle to bring together, in a non-threatening atmosphere, people of all persuasions, with a common interest in learning and development. From this common base all kinds of activities can occur on personal, group, community, county, regional, and national levels. For example, in Manhattan a food coop, community gardens, a crisis hotline, a women's center, an evening childcare facility, and all forms of political alliances have grown from courses offered through UFM. Similar developments have occured in other projects around the state of Kansas. Milestones in the growth of UFM have included the 1973 town-hall forums on public policy issues and a 1975 grant to replicate the Manhattan model of community education in 12 rural Kansas communities. (NEC)

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ALONG THE YELLOW-BRICK ROAD: THINGS ARE FINE DOWN KANSAS WAY[1*]

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In Manhattan, Kansas, during the fall of 1967, a group of people were meeting informally at someone's home to talk about society in the year 2,000. About the same time, another group was devoting time to creative expression explorations. One or two people from each group happened to know each other and thought that if there were two groups like this, there were probably other people in the community who would like to get together, exchange ideas, learn skills with one another, meet new friends and perhaps have a forum for community organization around projects of common concern and interest. After some more talking and thinking, these few people approached the student government at Kansas State University (KSU) in Manhattan, secured a few hundred dollars for a brochure and use of an office, put together seven courses,[2] led by volunteers, free of grades, credits and charges, and open to anyone. With this simple concept a free university called the Univeristy for Man was born in the spring of 1968.

The state of Kansas has been called a state of mind and, like any mind, it abounds with many interesting contradictions. In 1978 the Republican party regained control of the state legislature but, in an upset, lost the governorship to the Democrats. In this generally rural Republican conservative state, drinks are only served in private clubs, but the abortion laws are amongst the most liberal

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in the nation. And in the midst of the wheat and corn fields which take up much of the space, University for Man has developed into a major national organization in terms of impacting the worlds of lifelong learning, alternative education, and more recently, rural and community resource development.

During the summer of 1973, Killacky and Jan Flora (a noted rural sociologist) hosted a UFM course called "Perspectives on Kansas Communities." The course had four sessions in which social scientists were invited to present the results of their research on various aspects of Kansas communities, e.g., aging, the death of small towns, and community power structures. However, instead of having other social scientists respond to these presentations, as is often the case in such programs, invited as respondents were real world people, that is those whom had been subjects of the research. The response was amazing, as large numbers endured hot summer nights to participate in each session.

Spurred on by this response, UFM planned and contucted, under a grant from the Kansas Committee for the Humanities, a series of town-hall type forums on issues of public policy and concern. As part of this project, some of the forums were held in nearby smaller communities -- Clay Center, Abilene, and sometime later in Marysville -- and again the response was electric.[3] People of all ages turned out, took an active part in the discussions, and reinforced UFM's belief that rural America was indeed a vibrant, stimulating place.

In July 1975, UFM received a major grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, DHEW, to replicate the model of community education being practiced in Manhattan in twelve rural communities over a two-year period.

The model, very simply, is based on the assumption that anyone can teach and anyone can learn, regardless of their formal academic qualifications. From that small start in 1968, UFM currently offers around 900 courses and other events in Manhattan each year, and over 12,000 participatns take advantage of the program

annually. Leaders are still all volunteer, and courses are held in free space, e.g., churches, libraries, parks, campus classrooms and peoples' homes. A brochure is published three times annually and UFM is funded in Manhattan by the KSU Student Governing Association, the Division of Continuing Education and the local chapter of the United Way.

There are two main goals in the grant of 1975:

1. To set up a viable free university-community education program in twelve communities (six per year).

2. To create a framework so that each of these places would assume total local control of the project after one year.

The project was completed in 1977, and the first goal was completely met. In each community three brochures a year were produced with courses and other events led by local volunteers. The response was such that all of those involved realized that a huge unfilled need had been met. On an average, there were some 80 to 100 courses per year involving about 1,000 participatns in each place. (The average population of these places was 3,500). The second goal was also largely met in that 10 of the 12 projects were taken over locally, and today are still alive and well.

Assuming that an important aspect of community education and rural resource development had been identified, UFM secured in 1977 a two year grant to provide technical and training assistance to any community in Kansas which wished to start such a project. At the end of this period in July 1979, the goal of working with fifteen different projects was doubled. The impact has been such that the Kansas Legislature passed a bill, called the "Community Resource Act," which will provide funds for communities to apply for on a matching basis (up to a maximum of $6,000 over a three-year period) to develop their own local projects. During the period September 1977 to July 1978, some 31,000 people in the state took part in these projects at a very cost effective rate of between $7 and $8 per person per year. Interestingly enough, the free university movement (which has its national head-

quarters at UFM) is very much alive nationally with over 200 groups, and Kansas leads the nation with 30 projects in the state. These projects are located in places as small as Olsburg (population 169) and as large as Wichita.

Community Education and Rural Development

To get to know anything new an individual must participate in some form of learning. Most of Western society, in this century, has been socialized into thinking and believing, and almost rigidly adhering to the proposition that learning begins in kindergarten and ends, depending on one's means, anywhere from three to fifteen years later.

Fortunately there is a growing body of evidence (some folks call it lifelong learning) which is seeping far beyond the halls of academia out to the real world, and which is beginning to shatter this fallacy. UFM's model is contributing to this process and is providing an important basis for community resource development as evidenced by the following illustrations:

1. In Olsburg, Kansas the local community education project offered, among others, a course on local history. Fifty seven people came to this course and listened avidly as the five panelists, all of whom were over 80 years of age, took the audience on a spellbinding oral history tour of the city's past. The sessions were taped, extensive notes were taken and the results, along with subsequent courses, will provide the basis for a book on the history of that city to be published in conjunction with their centennial in 1980. As a result of this and other courses and projects (such as the establishment of a Farmer's Market in the summer of 1978) Olsburg has experienced major processes and ingredients for development, i.e., learning and a greater sense of community.

2. In another small community, a woman offered to lead a course in Geneology. She was from "the wrong side of the tracks," poor, rather destitute, lived in a ramshackle home, and local folks were aghast that Mrs. X would be doing this.

Fortunately several people signed up (perhaps out of curiosity about her, and yet where else might they have learned something of the subject without driving several hours to a larger metropolitan area) and they were overwhelmed by this woman's depth of knowledge and understanding. As a result, her self esteem and her neighbors' respect for her were significantly enhanced. The project also facilitated, in a non-threatening way, the breaking of several socio-economic barriers.[4]

3. In Marysville, Kansas a series entitled "The Death of a Farmer" attracted 230 small farmers to a forum addressing the plight of the family farm. The program was sponsored by every farm organization in the county. Each group was surprised at the response and readily admitted that had they done it alone they would have only attracted their own members. This program provides a fine example of another basis this model has for community development, i.e., cooperation rather than conflict between traditionally non-cooperative groups and organizations.

In other areas of the state there are and have been a wealth of courses and learning projects in agriculture, solar energy, appropriate technology, aerobic dance, all forms of the humanities, a multitude of arts and crafts, and participants have ranged in age from 3 to 92.

The organization of this model is simple. It is grounded in the concept that local people empowered with the skills and techniques to run and control their projects will, if they wish, have excellent and sustaining programs which will reflect local needs and provide creative responses to them. The UFM staff perceive the organization as a catalyst whose major aim is to transmit the skills to key local folks who wish to participate in such adventures. The model seems to work partially because it is an idea whose time has come. It is rurally oriented (though it can and has been adapted in some urban areas) and in a country where policy, politics and sources of funding have a heavy urban bias, this is a welcome breather. The model also works because we make ourselves visible to the projects and spend an enormous amount of time in personal contact with people at local levels; we are readily available in advising or consulting roles, <u>but the decisions about the projects must be made at the local level</u>.

Steps in Developing a Project

There are seven steps in the actual development of a project and four to which attention should be given once the project is underway:

1. The Starting Point: Identify one or more individuals who would like a project in their community, meet and explain the process to them and have them call a meeting of as many interested people as possible. At this meeting explain the free university-community education concept and how it can be applied to this community. After this initial meeting, a core group who want to work on the project should then address these issues:

What is lacking in our community?

What kinds of programs can a project like this provide to make life more meaningful in our town?

Will the group be independent, or sponsored by a church, library, extension or another community agency?

Where can space for meetings be found, and a telephone to work with?

Who should be on the advisory board?

How many brochures of courses need to be printed and how often?

The question of funding should not be one that deters people from participation. At this moment there are projects which run on as little as $50 per year or as much as $150,000 per year. Funding, like most everything else, will depend on location, size, availability of resources, etc.

2. Putting Together an Advisory Board: The board should be as representative of the group (community, county, etc.) to be served as possible, but should also include some community notables so that project legitimation can be achieved. There are four purposes for such a board:

a) For help in planning -- courses and projects which will be responsive to the interests and needs of those to be served.

b) For avoidance of duplication -- of services in a community and the fostering of interagency cooperation and collaboration.

c) For help in publicity -- formal and informal. Board members can and do serve as bridges to other groups and individuals that staff or volunteers may not have access to.

d) For help in funding -- from whatever local, regional and other sources the staff and board find for program coordination.

3. Getting Course and Project Ideas: Send out an interest survey; list 50 to 70 course possibilities and have respondents fill out the courses they would like to take and/or lead and have them return this to a local address. Distribute survey forms through stores, churches, banks, libraries, newspapers, clubs and organizations and announce a specific date by which they should be returned.

4. The First Brochure: After the survey forms come back, use the advisory board and others to match interests with potential leaders. Then visit the potential leaders and see if they will teach the course. Work out course description, time, meeting place and write all of this up for the brochure. The brochure may be as fancy or as simple as your resources permit.

5. Distribution of Brochures: Arrange for distribution through stores, churches, libraries and other public places. Concurrent arrangements should be made for press and radio publicity releases.

6. Registration: Hold registration about 10 to 14 days after the brochures have been distributed. Registration provides an opportunity for staff to meet those interested in participation, to get ideas for future projects, to gather numbers on enrollment for future funding presentations and to provide information for leaders on how many people are interested in taking their courses.

7. Leader Workshop: This can be held after registration and before classes begin. There are several reasons for such a gathering:

a) Leaders can get the names, addresses and numbers of those who have signed up for their courses.

b) A workshop presenting the various ways of leading a course can be offered. This is important for new leaders, as many of them have only previous experience of a "traditional classroom" which does not always work in a free university-community education setting. Teaching will be a new endeavor for most of the leaders, and this is a time to provide them support in that what they have to share is very important. It will give them an opportunity to talk about their ideas for the course and instill

in them a sense of excitement such that they really believe that what they have to offer will be a valuable contribution to their community.

c) It provides a chance for leaders and staff to meet each other, ask questions, exchange information and develop the important support feeling that without this group the project would not exist.

At this point classes begin and the project is truly underway. Depending on size, number of staff (volunteers or paid), etc. there are four points which will merit attention in varying degrees:

1. Keeping everyone who is involved in the project informed on what is happening and what progress is being made.

2. Project timetables are critical. These contain dates for future brochures, presentations, funding deadlines, etc.

3. Development of interagency cooperation will enrich the reputation of the project. It is always good to be on the lookout for other projects to which the free university-community education venture can contribute, e.g., food coops, community mental health centers, aging projects and youth employment programs are but a few examples.

4. Keeping records and data is essential. The greatest problem with the entire free university-alternative education movement has been the poor job we have done in not documenting how we do what we do. By keeping written records, people who come on the scene later into the project will have a much easier time learning what is happening and providing continuity. Of course such data also provides a viable foundation for a variety of evaluative procedures.

As for the survival of the people doing the legwork on these projects, here is a short survival checklist: a huge amount of patience, a large sense of humor, practical and theoretical knowledge aobut the task at hand, committment, a strong support group and the baility to recognize and utilize resources.

At a conference on Farm, Land and Food Policies held this past January in Nashville, Tennessee, sponsored by the Coalition for Alternative State and Local

Policies, over 500 people from 47 states and Puerto Rico came together. One of the major concerns expressed was the need for the development of coalitions between and amongst organizations concerned about the state of rural America. This model of free university-community education is one vehicle to develop such coalitions for it brings together, in a non-threatening atmosphere, people of all persuations, with a common interest in learning and development. From this common base all kinds of activities can occur on personal, group, community, county, regional and national levels. For example, in Manhattan a food coop, community gardens, a crisis hotline, a women's center, an evening childcare facility, all forms of political alliances and other organizations have grown from courses which were offered through University for Man. Similar developments have occured in other projects around the state of Kansas.

Since the spring of 1968 many papers, presentations and talks[5] have been offered by and about University for Man and community resource development in Kansas. As a staff we are a diverse group, but we are united in appreciating the profound sense of joy and rewards which this work has brought to our lives. We have found in rural Kansas, not just blowing winds, waving wheat and roads which lead to the Rockies, but a vast reservoir of resources overflowing with huge numbers of people of all ages, creeds and background who are very able, willing and ready to share their bountiful talents with each other in a manner which provides a significant corner-stone for viable community and rural resource development.

FOOTNOTES

1. This paper, in addition to drawing on our personal experiences in carrying out with work has drawn from the following sources:

Jim Killacky, "Kansas: Going Beyond the Little Red Schoolhouse," Journal of Alternative Human Services, Vol. 4, No. 2, Summer 1978, pp. 30-31.

Jim Killacky, "Community Education in Rural Kansas," presented at a conference: Outreach Programs of the Landgrant University, Which Publics Should they Serve? July 1978, Manhattan, Kansas.

Bill Draves and Cathy MacRunnels (eds.), The Free University Manual, Manhattan: University for Man, 1978.

2. The courses in that first brochure were: New Media Workshop, the Creative Experience, The Future of Belief, Toward the Year 2000, Military-Industrial Establishment, What is Woman Today? and Studies in Problematics.

3. For a more detailed description of this project see:

C.J. Killacky and J.K. Rippetoe, "Community Education in Kansas, A Challenge to Community Colleges," in Alternative Higher Education, Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 1976, pp. 51-60.

The point of crossing socio-economic barriers and cross culturation is addressed in more detail in:

4. J.K. Rippetoe and C.J. Killacky, "Educational Programs for Rural Communities: A Statewide Effort in Kansas," Educational Considerations, Vol. 4, No. 3, Spring, 1977, pp. 31-33.

5. An annotated bibliography of these papers and other materials is available by writing the authors.